# MMOZine

ISSUE 39 | JUNE 2012

*The world's most popular digital MMO magazine • Download. Read. Play*

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

## WARHAMMER® ONLINE WRATH OF HEROES™

## THE SECRET WORLD

## NEVERWINTER

## TERA

## AUTO CLUB REVOLUTION

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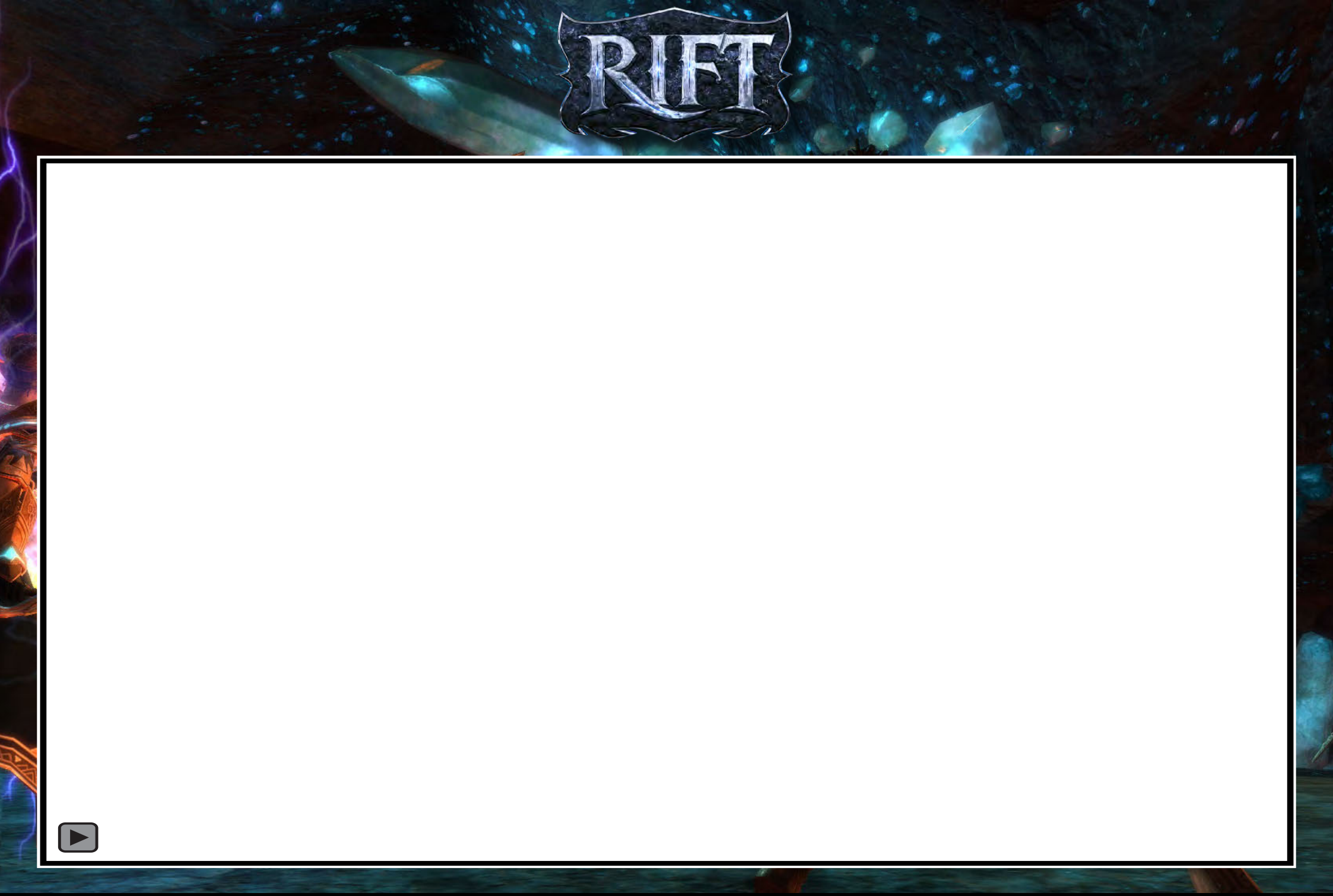


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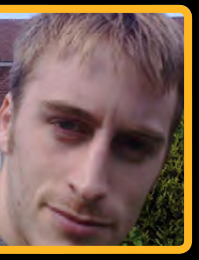

This month we have a veritable smörgåsbord of online experiences to satisfy your oh-so sensitive palate including the definitive verdict on Korean combat-centric MMORPG *TERA*, another in-depth look at the delightfully puzzling *The Secret World* and a preview of a game that almost has no place in the hallowed pages of this magazine: *Auto Club Revolution*.

Online gaming and cars going around a track repeatedly until somebody is determined the victor have been natural bedfellows since modems became a thing, but Eutechnyx's first free-to-play offering gives wannabe racers an all-new arena to interact with each other and more importantly get the most out of cars.

Continuing our trend of pursuing all things new we also have an interview with former 'Gamespotter' Carrie Gouskos. She reveals to us why Relic decided to take their infatuation with all-things *Warhammer* in a distinctly MOBA-inspired direction with *Wrath of Heroes*.

Certainly not an issue to be sniffed at!

**Andy Griffiths, Editor**
**mmozine@gamerzines.com**

# Don't miss! *This month's highlights!*

## QUICK FINDER


Elder Scrolls Online
Warhammer: Wrath of Heroes
Auto Club Revolution
Neverwinter
The Secret World
TERA



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THE SECRET WORLD

"ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MMORPGS OF OUR TIME"

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# THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

PUB: BETHESDA
DEV: IN-HOUSE

## FIRST LOOK

ONE TO WATCH!

*The Skyrim's the limit...*

Who knows whether Bethesda Games Studios are actually ready to put their MMO boots on after ruling the single-player RPG market for so long, but they've certainly gone after some impressive talent in their pursuit to finally make *Elder Scrolls* a multiplayer-only experience. Mythic's Matt Firor, of *Dark Age of Camelot* fame, is heading up the project along with long-time franchise protector and driving creative force, Todd Howard.

Interestingly, *Elder Scrolls Online* will be set a millenia before the events of Skyrim, with a Daedric prince plotting to pull all of Tamriel into the demon realm. Visually at least, *ESO* will be slightly more cartoony than many veterans will be expecting, but the gameplay players know and love will be represented, albeit in a slightly more restricted MMO form. The Thieves Guild, Dark Brotherhood, Fighters and Mages Guilds have all already been confirmed.

Apart from those saucy titbits we know relatively little about how this *Elder Scrolls* will be different from the rest, but Bethesda has already said on record that they want it to appeal to both MMORPG veterans and those that have only ever played previous games in this series, so expect an accessible experience.

This is the biggest MMO announcement since BioWare sent word of *Star Wars: The Old Republic* all those years ago and we have no doubt that we'll learn plenty more about this grand experiment during the forthcoming E3 show. There had better be dragons though, or there's going to be trouble.

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# NEVERWINTER

## FIRST LOOK

HOT NEW SHOTS!

PUB: PERFECT WORLD ENT.
DEV: CRYPTIC STUDIOS
LAST GAME: STAR TREK ONLINE
ETA: 2012

### QUICK QUOTES

*"The pace of the combat seems faster and more action-orientated than even Turbine's Dungeons & Dragons Online"*

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

*Well aren't you a sight for sore eyes?*

Between all the court wranglings with Atari and Cryptic Studios being bought by Perfect World, we thought that *Neverwinter* – yet another MMORPG set in the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe – would never see the light of day but thankfully it appears we were mistaken. Over the past month the makers of *Champions Online* reaffirmed their commitment to this distinctly fantasy experience with new screenshots, a target release window of 2012 and most surprisingly of all, a playable build at PAX East.

Development has clearly been gathering pace and Cryptic are doing some very interesting things with the source material. *Neverwinter* is set in the far future of the *D&D* universe with the world literally crumbling around the titular capital city, culminating in much change between the universe's different races. Players can still expect traditional fantasy tropes – giant spiders, skeleton warriors and obviously massive dragons – but the pace of the combat seems fast and more action-orientated than even Turbine's *DDO*. What's most intriguing though, is the community feature set, which allows players to create new questing content and queue up activities of authors which they trust. All of these details are just breaching the surface, so expect more news on *Neverwinter* during the months ahead. ■

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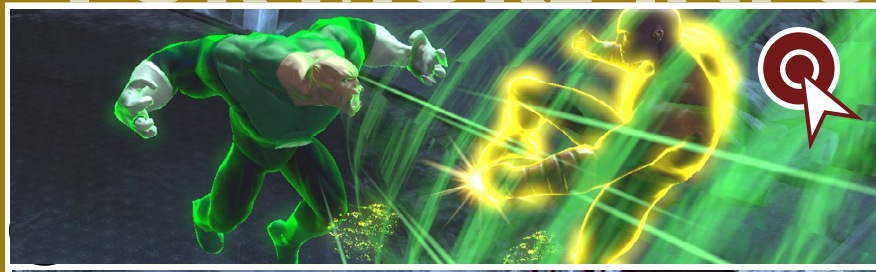
# INCOMING

## HOT NEWS FROM THE MMO WORLD!

CLICK EACH GAME FOR MORE INFO



## DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

PUB: SOE
DEV: IN-HOUSE

OUT NOW

Players have been asking for it and Sony have delivered, giving more PvP content for *DC Universe Online*. The Last Laugh DLC, which confusingly enough only has a tiny amount of Joker-related content, boasts a new powerset revolving around the use of a shield, four-on-four battles set in an array of superhero safehouses and 16 eight-on-eight heroes vs villains battles set inside either the Hall of Doom or the Watchtower.

New legend archetypes have also been added to the roster with Kilowog, a Green Lantern and Amon Sur all selectable. *DCUO* fans should find this update really exciting.

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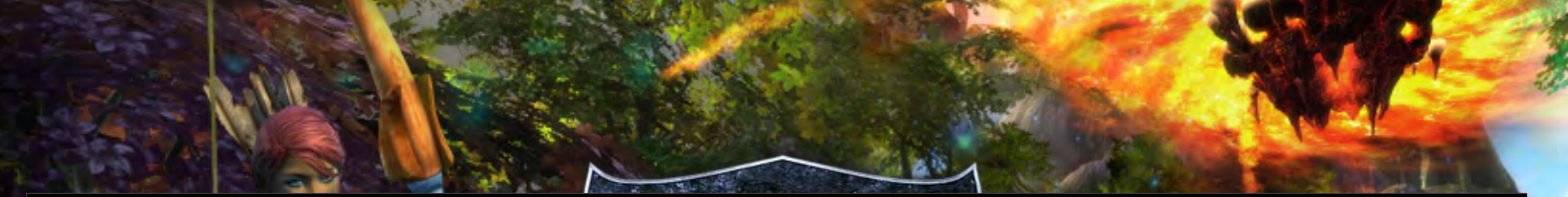

HI DEF VIDEO

# CARRIE GOUSKOS WARHAMMER: WRATH OF HEROES

## INTERVIEW

*We investigate this arena-based spin-off from Age of Reckoning*

PUB: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV: BIOWARE MYTHIC
ETA: OUT NOW (OPEN BETA)

### BIO

Carrie Gouskos is an industry veteran having previously worked for Acclaim, Gamespot and now BioWare Mythic as a Franchise Producer for all things *Warhammer*.

Like an unassuming Dwarf busily working in a garden shed, *Warhammer: Age of Reckoning* is still bubbling underneath the MMO radar catering to those who love Game Workshop's distinct fantasy setting. Early this year gamers were treated to the MOBA spin-off *Wrath of Heroes* which took the best of the *WAR*'s PvP aspects and streamlined them into a new standalone experience. This move was both derided and celebrated by *WAR*'s slender but immensely passionate community, some of whom thought Mythic had greater games to address. Recently we sat down with the developer's passionate Franchise Producer and *Warhammer* aficionado Carrie Gouskos to discuss why the team decided to do something so different.

**Why did Mythic feel the need to spin off *Wrath of Heroes* into its own thing?**

It was clear to us a couple of years ago that the games industry was changing and people wanted their content in different ways. Even people who like MMOs like their content differently, and at that time we were seeing the beginning of free-to-play.

We spent a lot of time looking at *Warhammer Online* and saying, "Should we take this game free-to-play?" And there were so many things that weren't quite right for free-to-play, like the fact it's such an RvR-focused game – the things that we'd have to sell lead us to question whether it would be the right move. So we decided to turn that question on its head. We've seen a lot of full-blown MMOs go free-to-play and that's certainly a tactic, and don't get me wrong that doesn't rule out that *Warhammer Online* going that way, but instead we said, "Let's find out what is the core of this experience that people like and bring it to the forefront." We had the epiphany of three teams for this game and then we realised we couldn't in any way make it part of *Warhammer Online*.

> **"WE'RE TRYING TO BRING THE THINGS WE LIKE MOST ABOUT WARHAMMER INTO THIS GAME"**

To re-architect that entire game to cater to three-team play wasn't an option. Another really key element is that when you want a lot of people to play RvR, population is really important. The whole thing about picking servers and players asking each other what servers they're on and people being split up is what we wanted to invert. *Wrath of Heroes* has one server and then it builds out from that.

Being able to change the core gameplay allowed us to play around with things we didn't have in *Warhammer*, for instance monster characters like the Ogre. We're getting fun, a little silly, but we're trying to bring the things we like most about *Warhammer* into this game, but it's for a different audience. We still have the *Warhammer Online* core RvR, and this may or may not be for them – I think this is for a different type of person. This is more, 'I just want to jump in, have a good experience and carry on with my day'.

**You had to look for the humour in *WAR*, but in *Wrath of Heroes* it's a lot more apparent. It's quite *DOTA*-esque to an extent.**

When we announced *WoH* at gamescom last year, a lot of people called it a 'direct control MOBA', so we started talking about it as MOBA.

One of the things which became really apparent is that people can't differentiate between *DOTA* and a MOBA. So if somebody comes to this game with the idea that it's *DOTA* they won't get the experience they're expecting. We've gone away from talking about it like that and basically described it as an MMORPG battleground with a *League of Legends* spin on it.

We're rotating between three different characters so, when you come into play, if you haven't invested anything at all there will be several free heroes you can choose from. Then you can play and earn gold to buy more, but the idea is that we give you the opportunity to jump in and just play.

**At the moment *Wrath of Heroes* feel like a bona fide spin-off rather than necessarily its own thing. Will that change as the game develops?**

We've thought about and talked about everything. We've talked about crazy modes and crazy styles of characters, and I think we will rely on how the community is rallying around it because we might have some really cool ideas.

One of my favourite modes in gameplay is *Gears of War*'s Horde mode. I love that idea, so we have teams of six why not put in some kind of Horde mode? It would work in these maps. I'd love that, but it may be that the community doesn't want anything to do with it, so we're going to gauge all that before committing to it.

**I guess that's where the current open Beta comes in. How crucial is player participation to *Wrath of Heroes*' development?**

The more people we get in who give us feedback the better we can get a sense of 'Right, this is what the community wants.' We know very clearly that there are *Warhammer* fans playing this, because it's such a compelling IP. It brings people to the game, so now it's a case of who's next? Is it the e-sports guys? Who is it? What do they find interesting about it?

I think what we'll probably end up seeing [enjoying this game] is a lot of people who really love MMORPG's, but don't have either the time or the money to get to this experience, as it's often gated behind high level content.

**The free-to-play landscape which *Wrath of Heroes* finds itself in changing rapidly. You can't be so direct when it comes to pricing any more, you almost have to be a bit sneaky with more items sold at a lower price. Is that a trend you guys agree with?**

The best way to do it is just to do the offer of the time versus money reward. We've tweaked the time part of the time versus money scale, because we came out a little too aggressive, and so we listened to the players and said, 'Alright, we'll give you more gold'. As long as you respect that some people have time and some people have money and offer everything in both currencies it doesn't matter.

There are plenty of people who play this game and unlock things without ever spending a dime. That's okay, but one of the reasons free-to-play has been so successful is that there are those people who say, "You know what, I'm going to give you £10 or whatever." It's all about having a shortcut to deal with that. Those two sets of people can play together and have a symbiotic relationship. One isn't necessarily more powerful than the other, though.

**Is that where the sales come in? How often do you have offers on certain characters?**

We're always trying to bring in new offers. A big reason is because there are the people who only want to buy when there are offers. So if you don't keep providing offers, then they don't buy, and obviously at the end of the day I don't care if you spend fake or real money, I want you to be thinking about what's on sale today and what you can get? It seems to work well, too.

**There's a big initiative to incentivise existing *WAR* players to get involved with *Wrath of Heroes* with Mythic offering free gold and experience boost to existing subscribers. Why are you going after those players?**

That's just out of respect to the subscribers that we have with *Age of Reckoning*. Of course some of them are like, "Why are you working on something else? Why don't you just put it all in Reckoning?" And the answer is we want to bring the love of *Warhammer* to everybody.

You have to come to them where they are; you can't just say 'play our game it's awesome'! We certainly want to reward *Warhammer Online*'s active subscribers as they're loyal and we love them – they're our bread and butter. We didn't want to leave them out in the cold, but we're still working on a lot of things. A lot of things we do on this game, as we use the same assets, and we can bring them back into *Age of Reckoning*. We're trying to enable as much crossover between the two teams as possible.

**Is *Wrath of Heroes* an example of Mythic moving on? Does it mean you're moving into new design avenues, genres etc?**

We're sort of discovering this kind of gameplay for ourselves as a part of BioWare. There's definitely cool stuff we want to do in this space. Honestly, *Star Wars* is such a tremendous thing. I look at that team and go okay it's *Star Wars*, I get it. We're looking to bring two different kinds of experiences and melding them together. ■

> ***"THERE ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE WHO PLAY THIS GAME AND UNLOCK THINGS WITHOUT EVER SPENDING A DIME"***

TO READ THE REST OF THE INTERVIEW ONLINE CLICK HERE

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# THE SECRET WORLD
## HANDS-ON

PUB: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV: FUNCOM
LAST GAME: AGE OF CONAN
ETA: 19TH JUNE

### TWITTER

**@Kismat**
I will only accept your friend request if you allow me to recruit you for the Templars.

**@Proi_RS**
Man, I feel like I picked the wrong team in @funcom_tsw's The Secret War. Templars are getting their asses kicked.

**@Funcom**
One million gamers registered for The Secret World Beta.

**@Ranger1325**
@funcom_tsw What an amazing weekend! This was the best Beta I've ever been a part of. I cannot wait for release!

**@Ancalime**
Well, THAT was an unexpected first 5 minutes.

**TWEET US @GAMERZINES**

*Peeling back the layers of truth*

In little under a month, Funcom finally let loose their most secretive online endeavour ever onto the world, yet somewhat fittingly, most gamers haven't really got a scooby about what makes this MMORPG different from the rest. Sure you probably know that it's set in the real world with three underground societies – Dragon, The Templars and Illuminati – all fighting to keep an invasion of various occult forces at bay, but what we're talking about is the real nitty gritty: what's the levelling curve like? How does the progression structure work without rigid classes and levelling? Are Funcom continuing their fine story-led lineage? What is the real world setting like? Are their cats?

Well, the majority of these questions will soon be answered as we've been given access to *The Secret World* in its Beta form and we'd like to tell you what it's all about, while spoiling as little of the story as possible.

Following on from our previous time with this sci-fi/horror experience, we decided to roll out as a member of the Illuminati – only this time we wouldn't be fast-tracked to Egypt, a dozen or so hours into the progression curve. Instead we experienced the game with minimal meddling, beginning in New York and journeying to the unluckiest town on Solomon Island – Kingsmouth.

Much like Funcom's previous endeavours, *The Secret World* prides itself on telling a good story, at least during the early levels, with well-directed cut-scenes, excellent voiceacting and intriguing settings that don't quite show their hand until you've spent plenty of time

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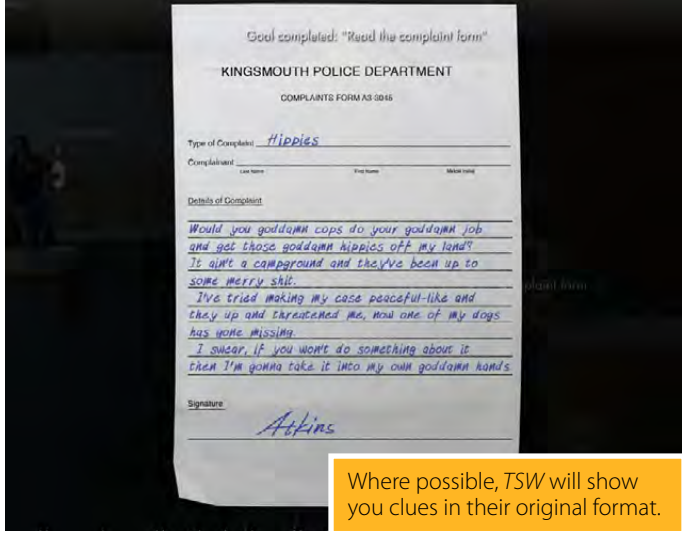
ROLL OVER FOR INFO!

In *TSW*, the fabric of space and time is literally beginning to give way.


Goal completed: "Read the complaint form"
KINGSMOUTH POLICE DEPARTMENT
COMPLAINTS FORM A3 08/45
Type of Complaint: Hippies
Complainant
Details of Complaint
Would you goddamn cops do your goddamn job and get those goddamn hippies off my land? It ain't a campground and they've been up to some merry shit.
I've tried making my case peaceful-like and they up and threatened me, now one of my dogs has gone missing.
I swear, if you won't do something about it then I'm gonna take it into my own goddamn hands.
Signature
Atkins

Where possible, *TSW* will show you clues in their original format.

looking around their various nooks and crannies. The dialogue in these is excellent, which is certainly a good thing as you'll be hearing lots of it. Following on from the traditions forged by *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, the majority of quests you take part in are bookended by cut-scenes or voiceover, sometimes both. It's a very affective approach – immersing the player not only in the world, but also in whatever activity they're being asked to do.

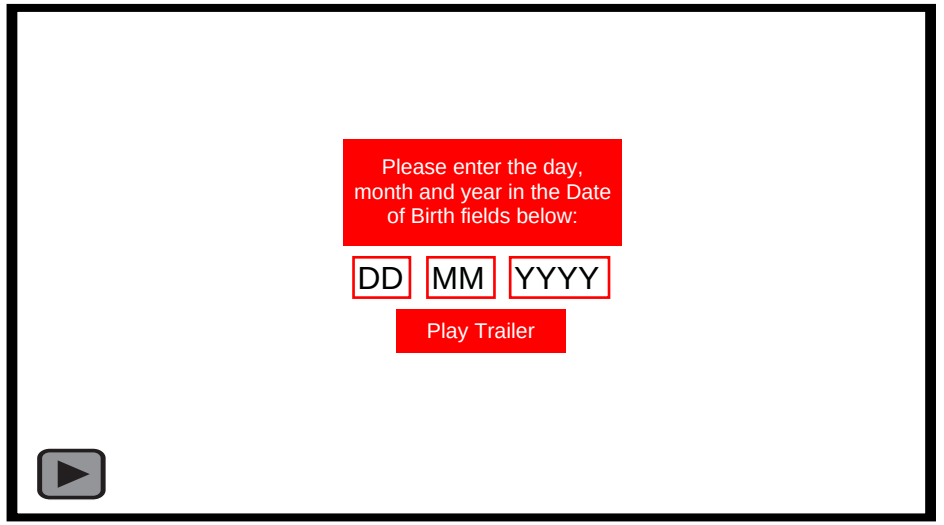
## ZOMBIE ISLAND

On Solomon Island (the first real questing zone) the majority of quests took place in the open world and ranged wildly from defending a survivor base from waves of zombies, trailing a suicide victim, searching for a hidden datapad and trying to decipher its numerical lock. Most of the enemies we faced were a variety of ghosts, zombies, and mutated creatures who had been irrevocably altered by a mysterious fog which had swept over the island. Despite the horror movie aesthetic there was still a palpable sadness to exploration as we witnessed society breakdown and read testimonies from those immune to the fog struggling to survive thanks to what used to be their loved ones attacking them. Needless to say this isn't a light and fluffy experience.

> *"Most quests belong more in the adventure realm rather than the MMO one"*

The typical kill-and-collect activities were still in place, but in nowhere near the numbers of regular MMORPGs. Instead, most of the quests belonged more in the adventure realm rather than the MMO one, and the interface doesn't always make what you have to do next that clear.

It would be very easy to call this lazy design, but the truth is that once you get your head around the fact that you can't mindlessly grind



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Play Trailer

Visually, *The Secret World* isn't great, but tonally it has plenty going for it.

quests to get XP you begin to enjoy the setting much more. Activities required all of our cognitive abilities to get that next tasty story morsel and inevitably raise our character's combat abilities.

Continuing *TSW*'s middle finger to the establishment mentality, there's no level gauging for either yourself, monsters, or characters around you. What this means in practice is that the amount of XP necessary to gain the next ability or skill point never changes and gives progression a very fluid feel.

There isn't that immediacy of knowing when you're meandering into an area which is way above your level, and it can be hard sometimes to get the feeling that you're progressing your character in the best possible way without that numerical feedback.

Skill selection varies between passive and active skills, only seven of each can be equipped at any time. There's definitely room for freedom and experimentation, but during the early hours of our adventure we would've relished a bit more guidance.

There are pre-determined decks to guide you towards optimum builds, but it's easy to see the freedom in this system overwhelming casual players. Another concession which shocked us was the inability to tackle more than six quests at a time, with taking on more than that leading it to existing activities shelved until you initiated them again by talking to the relevant NPC.

> *"Some online gamers will lose themselves in its freeform structure, but most will relish it"*

Where games like *Rift*, *TERA* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic* actively encourage players to accept as many quests as possible in order to speed up progression, Funcom deliberately limits your choices in order to allow you to dial down and really think about your objective, allowing them to create quests which require much more thought. That's really the point though. *The Secret World* isn't another *World of Warcraft* clone, it's trying to do something different in the online space and for that it should be applauded. Some online gamers will lose themselves in its freeform structure, but most will relish it. Funcom's effort might even attract those who aren't usually interested in MMORPGs and that's certainly something worth advocating. Expect a full review next month. ■

In Kingsmouth the police are completely out of their depth fighting mysterious evil forces.

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*ACR*'s line-up of cars is as diverse as it is large.

# AUTO CLUB REVOLUTION

## HANDS-ON

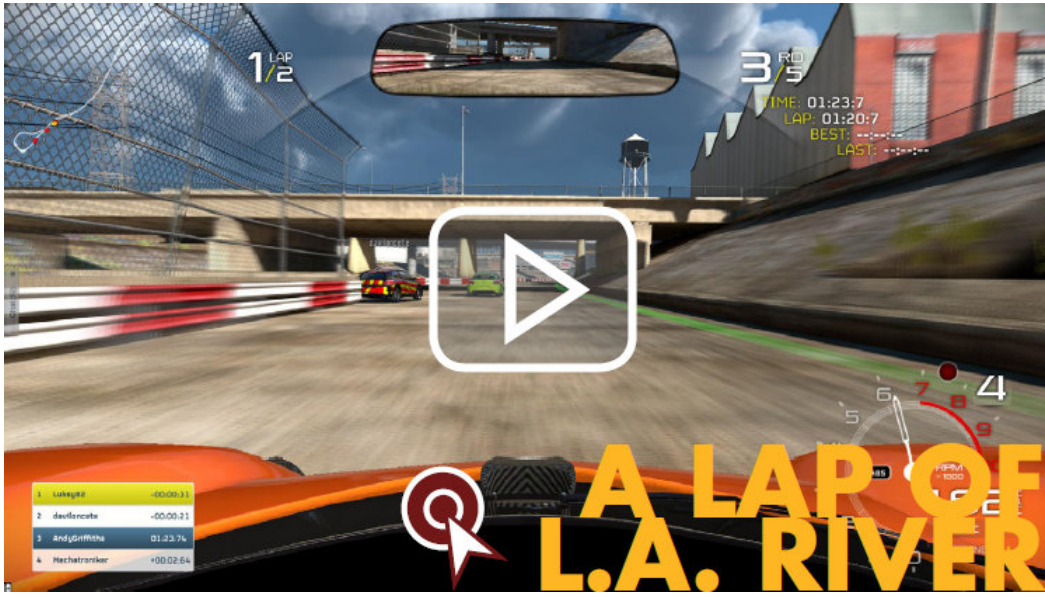
EXCLUSIVE SHOTS

PUB: EUTECHNYX
DEV: IN-HOUSE
LAST GAME: NASCAR: THE GAME 2011
ETA: IN OPEN BETA

*Car lovers, welcome to a new online paradise*

What's this? A racing game in *MMOZine*? Well, Eutechnyx's four-wheeled offering is trying something different to the norm. The free-to-play game utilises a browser-based framework and is more reminiscent of a online experience than an offline one, with the ability for car lovers from around the globe to get together, customise, paint and upgrade their favourite real-world creations.

From the outset, *Auto Club Revolution* seems like a sim-orientated experience with plenty of different racing aids like traction control, automatic braking and colour-coded racing lines to ease you into the action, but the truth is this is very much an arcade experience. The cars look beautiful and meticulously detailed with real-world tracks like *Spa-Francorchamps*, *Silverstone*, *Daytona* and the altogether under-rated *Infinion Raceway* for you to try are also very convincing, but the handling model is very forgiving with no damage being simulated even when crashing into barriers – or other drivers for that matter – at 100mph-plus. Frankly though, that isn't Eutechnyx's aim. Much like *Forza* makers Turn 10, they want gamers to interact with cars in a way that emphasises fun over authenticity and that comes across




## TWITTER

**@DonKhatib**
I'm collecting my free 2011 BMW 1er M Coupé at Auto Club Revolution.

**@AutoClubRev**
Want a McLaren MP4-12C for your @AutoClubRev account? Tell us why using #acrevent for your chance to win one.

**@HundredProofSam**
Been playing Auto Club Revolution. Not bad but I fear I'm at the point where the free content stops...

**@TeamCandace**
Any racing fans out there? Auto Club Revolution is a free, web-based sim racer. It's in beta, and it's pretty cool!

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

The amount of upgrades available mean that any car in the roster can compete with another, as long as you spend enough credits.

With the handbrake it's very easy to kick the rear out and not lose control.

in the handling with the handbrake more than happy to spin your overpowered supercar or mild-mannered saloon 90 degrees to help you negotiate tricky chicanes a little easier.

## GETTING HOOKED UP

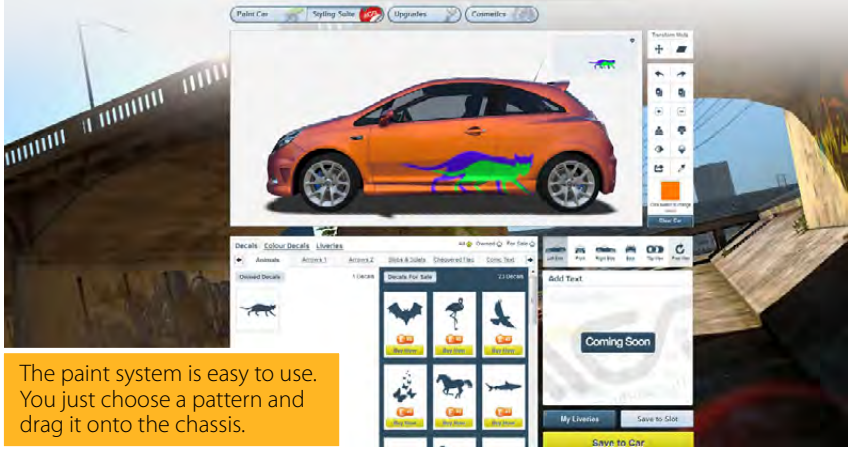
At its core, *Auto Club Revolution* is actually a two-part experience, split between a browser and separate client. Once you log into the game, the first thing you see is your profile flanked by various options: the Race Hangout which is a chat room where you can talk and race against others, the Workshop where you can upgrade and paint your vehicle using a layer-based toolset, and finally the Showroom which is where you purchase the growing number of real-world cars for real cash.

Where the separate game client comes in is when you actually initiate races with other competitors – you can host a race or join another. Point-to-point, consecutive laps or elimination modes are offered, with more in the works. Once the room is full, with a maximum population cap at eight for the moment, the client automatically boots up and you hit the track. Minute-long loading times are a necessary inconvenience as everybody syncs to whichever player is hosting, but occasionally there are connection drop outs or other race-halting issues which are immensely frustrating when they occur. That said, these sorts of issues are to be expected of a game that's still in Beta, and we're sure Eutechnyx are working on stabilising their netcode for the final launch.

> *"When everything works as it should then the pack racing is really enjoyable"*

When everything works as it should the pack racing is really enjoyable, with the lack of any damage simulation allowing a lot

The extra attention paid to BMW's 1M Coupé is clear to see.




The paint system is easy to use. You just choose a pattern and drag it onto the chassis.

The lack of damage modelling encourages drivers to take risks.

of boisterous bumper banging, but it's all in good fun with generous amounts of credits given out on the completion of races to spend on upgrades for your car, patterns and paintjobs. There is an over-arching levelling structure which gifts cars when you hit certain levels, but it would be nice if it was possible to use credits to add new selections to your garage. That said, all tracks – both real-world and fictional – are available to all players for free, so this game isn't all about rinsing your online wallet.

What's really interesting though, is that manufacturers like BMW are starting to look at *Auto Club Revolution* as a way of immortalising particularly attractive creations like the 1M Coupé with supporting challenges, tracks and videos, and a first for any car in this game's line-up, a cockpit view.

We suspect this kind of collaboration is the first of many, and as long as gamers get a free car out of it – albeit by jumping through a few brand-laden hoops – it's a perfectly acceptable proposition. We just wish every car on the roster was given the same kind of love and attention, as really an in-car view should be standard in this day and age, and the fact that other cars which can be as costly as £5 don't have it is hard to swallow.

Eutechnyx's first foray into free-to-play gaming is undoubtedly a good deal for anyone who has a passion for online racing. There are a few things we'd certainly like to see changed, and client reliability definitely needs to be improved, but we suspect Eutechnyx will remedy those issues soon.

> *"Eutechnyx's first foray into free-to-play gaming is undoubtedly a good deal"*

Make no mistake, this isn't the kind of online offering which will take over your life, like many MMORPGs, but it is a perfect regular hour-long distraction if you want to take a particularly gorgeous car out for a spin or race against your mates. And there's certainly more than enough room for a game like that online. ■

ZOOM

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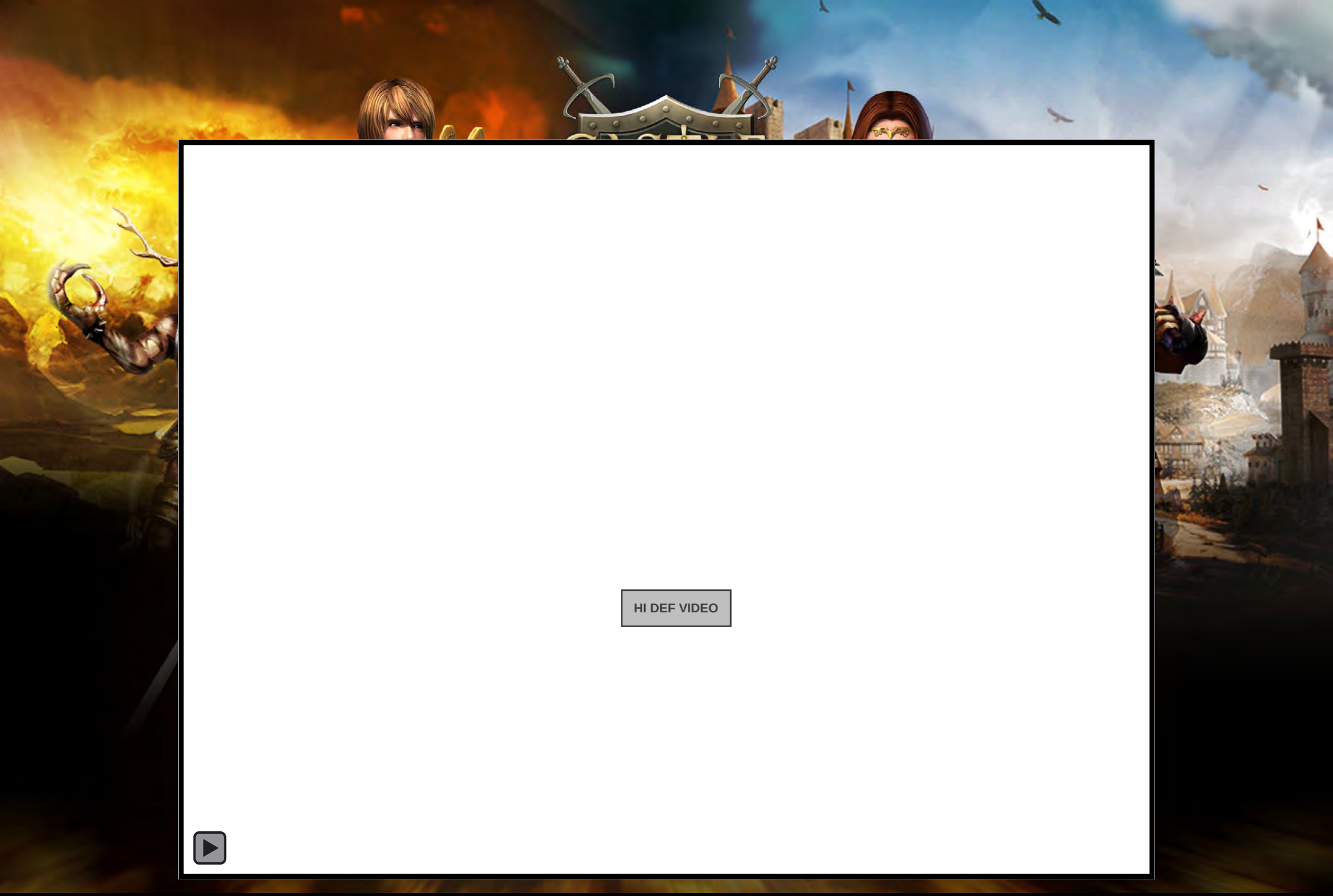


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# TERA

*The whole world is a battleground*

ROLL OVER FOR INFO!

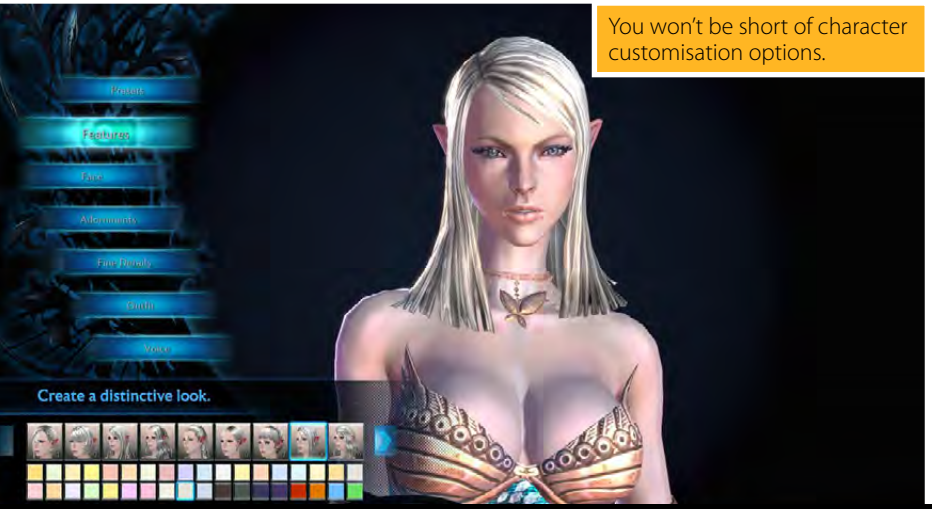
PUB: FROGSTER
DEV: BLUEHOLE STUDIO
LAST GAME: N/A
ETA: OUT NOW

It's getting harder and harder to please us gamers. Five years ago we wouldn't have thought twice about paying a huge chunk of cash for the privilege of sampling an MMO for 30 days before having to stump up a further monthly fee to retain access, but in a world irreversibly transformed by free-to-play, that proposition is a difficult one to get on-board with, especially when you don't have a certain universe created by George Lucas to rely on.

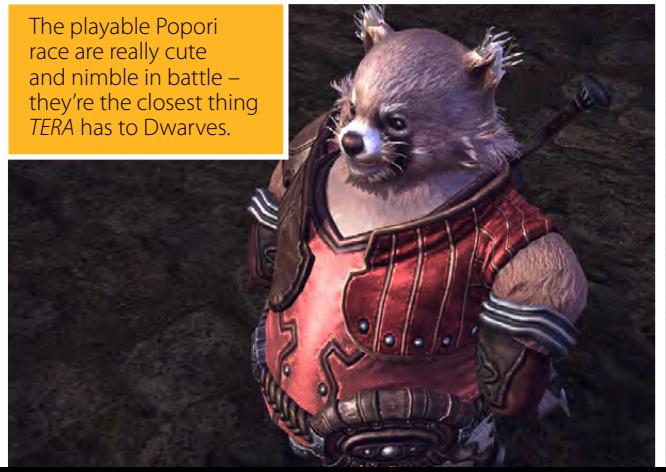
On paper at least, *TERA* is undoubtedly a hard sell, but its design harkens back to the founding principles which made MMOs such a promising genre to begin with: playing with others is, and should be, fun. With games like *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, *The Secret World* and even the almighty *Guild Wars 2* currently looking to 'personalise' the MMO experience, it's refreshing to play a game tailored for social interaction and guild play – although it does take a while to get going.

First impressions certainly paint *TERA* in a really positive light – just look at those screenshots! The *Unreal 3*-powered visuals give the graphics a fidelity rarely seen in online-only games, with highly imaginative character and environment design to back it up. Unfortunately this ingenuity is a little let down by an unashamedly generic setting. The playerbase isn't split into competing factions as is the norm, instead each of the seven classes and eight races start on an island where they're slowly introduced to a plot revolving around demons and devils returning to the world after being expelled for centuries. It's the kind of fantasy claptrap that has become all-too commonplace in gaming, but thankfully it isn't given too much attention aside from the occasional cut-scene.

There's little to no voiceacting for quests usually, with the majority of activities supported by boxes containing walls of text which are easy to skip over. It's an approach very reminiscent of *Rift*, and like *Trion World*'s competing fantasy experience, it's very easy to find yourself trying to complete a dozen or so quests at a time, with the majority of them revolving around very traditional activities

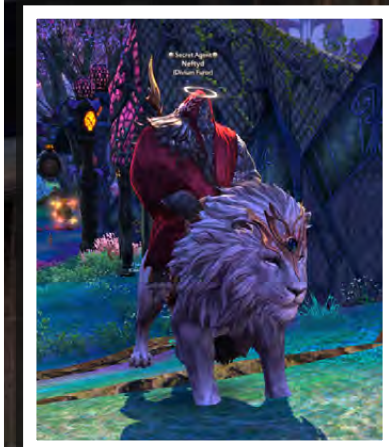



You won't be short of character customisation options.



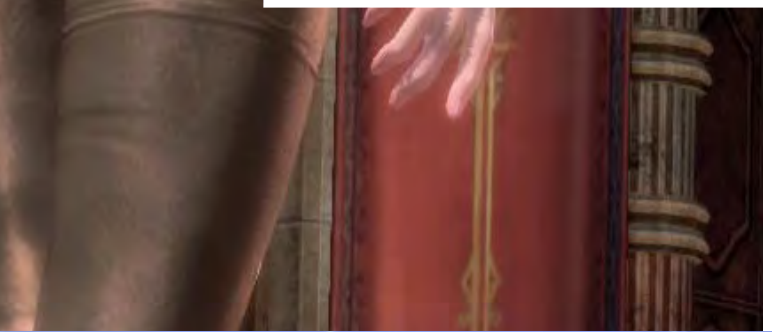
The playable Popori race are really cute and nimble in battle – they're the closest thing *TERA* has to Dwarves.

*TERA*'s BAMs (Big-Ass Monsters) aren't only located at the end of instances – they also wander the open world.



## MOUNT UP

As soon as you leave the starter zone, 'Dawn Island', you gain access to mounts which is a good thing as the world of Arborea is absolutely huge. There are several breeds of mounts, all of which are capable of different speeds, but wisely these four-legged tools of convenience aren't the only way to travel around. There are also teleport points and scrolls to enable instantaneous travel to settlements, as well as glorious Pegasus unicorns which fly from multiple regions around the world to another, in a style *Aion* players will find familiar. As the vast majority of quests take part in the open world, the amount of traversal choices available in *TERA* are certainly welcome.



like see NPC X, kill Y of Z creature, collect dropped spoils from their corpses, etc. In MMORPG terms it's the kind of quest design which is very easy to criticise for being unimaginative and predictable, but in *TERA* it has one saving grace which saves it from becoming a boring slog, and it's that combat is brilliant.

animations to determine their next attack and avoid their best moves in order to utilise your own. *TERA*'s combat is the best we've played in any MMO and the progression curve really plays into that.

During our playthrough as a Sorcerer we were constantly given new skills every two levels without any branching or the need for attribute allocation, and that continues right up to the level 60 cap. Some hinged on traditional ranged DPS attacks, others were about getting close to any enemy – with some nifty teleporting powers thrown in for good measure – but the point is that we had plenty of skills to pound any target into the ground with, be they NPC or human. That's when *TERA* gets really interesting.

As you progress through the levels and more key game mechanisms are introduced to you – like glyphs for upgrading skills and crystals for strengthening weaponry – it soon

As you gain levels and explore more of Arborea, the darker the world seems to get.

## READY, AIM, FIRE!

There are no auto-targeting or queuing up skills, instead all attacks are reticule-based with players having to aim at their enemy's head, torso or other sensitive areas to perform critical attacks, as well as a very tight dodge and counter system with context-sensitive attacks popping up in the interface when it's best to use them. This is a simple yet bandwidth-intensive system, which results in you engaging with your prey – anticipating their often sublime movement

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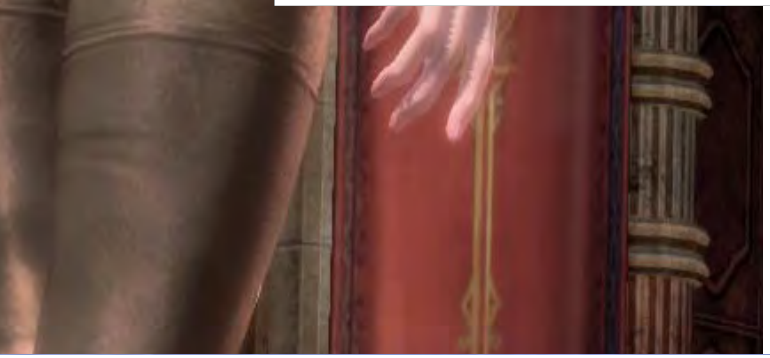
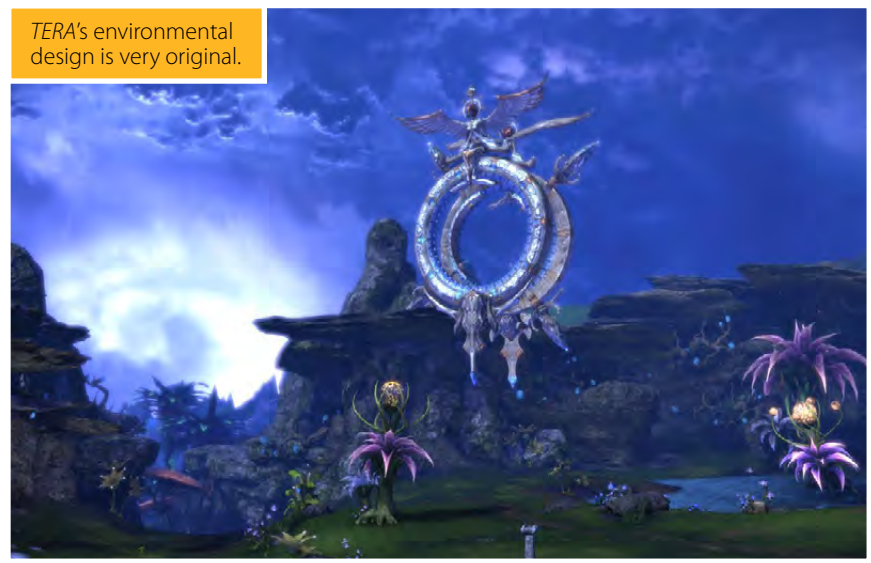
Bluehole Studio's character animations breathe new life into traditional fantasy races.

ZOOM





*TERA*'s environmental design is very original.

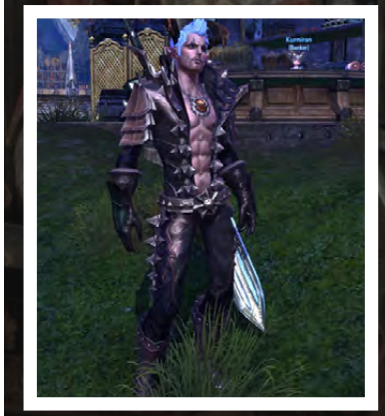
becomes clear that *TERA* isn't really a 'theme park' experience. Arborea isn't a world which is really trying to tell you an interesting story, instead it's been finely crafted to offer you – and more specifically, your guild – a chance to make a name for yourselves on its servers.

Frankly, we're not sure why this game has any PvE servers at all, as rolling out into a PvP-optimised world would utterly transform our experience. Being part of a big guild is an absolute must from level 11 onwards, as GvG battles aren't fought in purpose-built arenas, instead they take place all over the world. It's a system very reminiscent of one utilised in *World of Warcraft*, but wisely the localisation team hasn't neutered any of the griefing potential.

Basically all player kills in the world count, regardless of level discrepancy between two combatants, so you could just be stepping out of the capital of Velika for the first time, and get ambushed by two level-60 characters and the kill would be just as valuable as that of an evenly matched battle. Having on-going wars between two clans completely changes the dynamic of adventuring and progression, as players give others who have their name coated in blood red (indicating an enemy combatant) a wide birth or alternatively head in their direction to register an easy kill for the war effort.

> *"Rolling out into a PvP-optimised world utterly transformed our experience"*

This system has been utilised before but when coupled with the action-orientated combat system, it feels exciting and forces different guild members to group up in order



## THE KILLING FIELDS

Unlike other MMORPGs, *TERA*'s guild-on-guild combat doesn't take place in instanced arenas, instead all kills of enemy players occur in the open world. Enemy clan members are denoted by red names above their head which gives a really cool Wild West-vibe to questing outside of towns, as you can never really put your guard down unless you teaming with guildees. Higher levels ganging up on lower levels outside of towns is commonplace, but if you get into trouble you can ask for friends to help or switch to another world channel.

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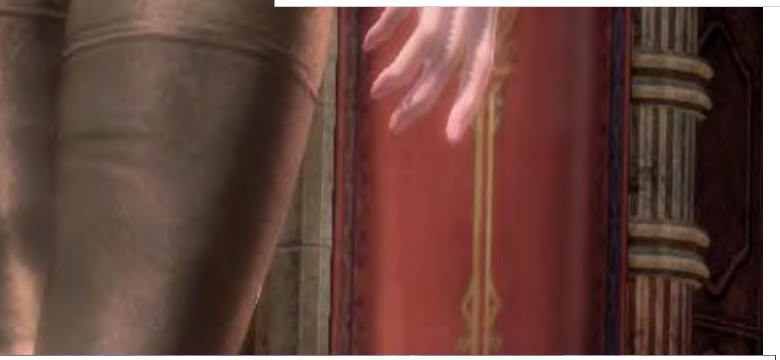
Occasionally you'll need to place inventory items to complete quests, but for the most part you'll usually just need to kill a bunch of monsters.



Despite a lack of audio cues, the world still has a healthy portion of character.

to safely avoid the inevitable 'ganking' that this system lends itself.

Of course, players can always change to a different channel (world instance) if they really want to avoid being easy pickings for higher players, but usually proceedings don't play out like that. Instead you feel wronged when another player goes out of their way to attack you, as you exit the safety of a town or settlement, so much so that we've teamed up with multiple lower-level players to take out a griefer camping for kills before, and it felt fantastic to turn the tide on the aggressor.

*"Guild leaders can even apply to run a town in Arborea via community elections"*

There are many mechanisms in *TERA* which break down the walls associated with online interaction, like the health-increasing campfires which encourage players to group around a point of their own choosing like heat-seeking hobos inevitably sparking conversation and hi-jinks, and as a result it's hard not to romanticise your experiences.

MMORPGs used to be all about social interaction and meeting new players, and this is an experience which definitely harkens back to that tradition. Only there are plenty of modern conventions which make teaming up a lot easier, such as a separate menu for advertising your services to team leaders, and an instance matchmaking system, so you don't have to spam local chat in order to get noticed – guild leaders can even apply to run a town in Arborea via community elections. We didn't have a chance to sample this part of *TERA*, simply because your guild needs to have 100 members, 4,000 gold and a level 50 GM to be eligible, but from the outside at least it sounds exciting.

When you consider all the social features *TERA* boasts, it becomes much easier to forgive the subscription-only MMO for its plot

## ASSUMING CONTROL

Whenever you connect an Xbox 360 gamepad to your PC while playing *TERA*, the client will automatically attune itself to your new control method. All hot bar skills are given a button on the pad, aided by the triggers acting as modifiers. It's a surprisingly good addition and one that means you could very easily control *TERA* without needing to use the keyboard and mouse, at least in short bursts. Obviously typing commands is out, as is talking with your guild buddies, but you can access your inventory and even control the cursor by using the D-pad. It's nice to have the option at least.

Don't worry, blood is most definitely back in!

Every element of the UI is completely customisable.

ambiguity and its somewhat templated approach to world design. Make no mistake, you'll see some fantastic sights right the way up to level 60, but you'll soon recognise certain traits associated with environment layout, as there's just a lot of empty land.

There's also a bulky crafting system which is much more accessible than other MMOs, without being anywhere near as intensive. Instead, what you'll find is that combining items is simply a case of going to a local workshop, using their stations and adding the required components in your inventory. Simple.

The majority of your time will be taken up finding materials, but again it doesn't feel so labour intensive that you feel it's not worth the effort.

Aside from an ill-thought out Prologue section, which bulks up your character to level 20 before busting you back down again, *TERA* is a really smooth MMO experience which packs in everything you'd want from a Triple-A subscription-only product. However, while other developers are betting on the quality of their story and world design to entice players to invest new cash every month, Bluehole are betting on their community providing the majority of the entertainment by providing the functions necessary to sustain 'guildees' long after the 30-day period has run its course.

> *"TERA has everything you'd want from a Triple-A subscription-only product"*

Whether their approach will shift *TERA*'s inevitable switch to a free-to-play model remains to be seen, but we can safely say that this MMORPG hooked us in a way that only *City of Heroes* and *Everquest 2* have done so before, by empowering the player and his supporting guild – not just making them small-time entities in a wider story arc. That's something fewer and fewer modern MMOs can boast and we're glad that at least one developer out there is hearkening back to the ideals which make MMORPGs such an exciting genre to be a part of in the first place. ■

## FINAL VERDICT

*A well-rounded online experience which packs the most satisfying combat ever seen in an MMORPG*

- ⊕ Arborea is a beautiful and surprisingly varied world to explore
- ⊕ Matchmaking, elections, auctions... everything you'd want is here
- ⊖ The plot is the worst kind of fantasy humdrum

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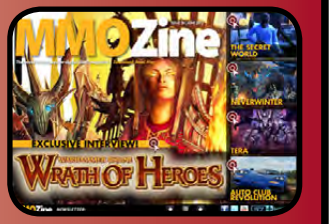


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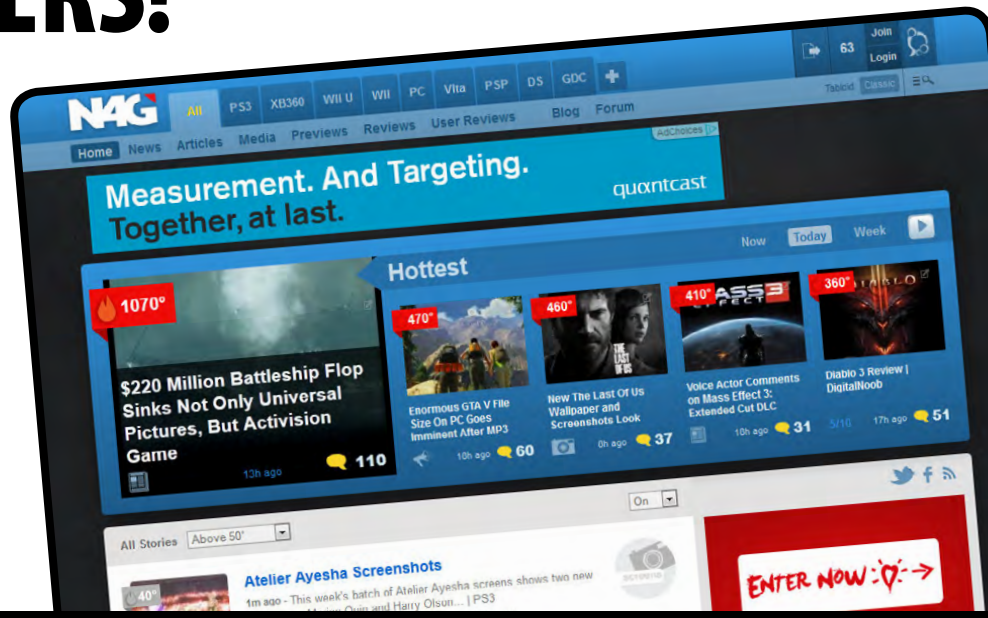


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